

THE
OBSERVATION
OF THE

LORD'S DAY

RECOMMENDED,

SERMON

UPON

MARK II. 27.

BY T. TAYLER.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Sermon was preached some time ago, to a congregation of Protestant Dissenters in Carter-Lane, London; and is now printed, to be given away, at the request of a Friend, to whom the Author is under great obligations. The Author wishes the blessing of God may attend this sincere attempt to promote his glory; and that all who read the discourse, would seriously consider the subject, and resolutely follow the deliberate convictions of their own consciences.

MARK II. 27.

And he said unto them, the Sabbath was made for Man, and not Man for the Sabbath.

THE observation of one day in seven for the purposes of religion, is of so much importance to the advancement, I might have said to the very being of religion in the world—the neglect of it, is attended with such dreadful consequences, to nations, families, and particular persons, and this neglect, alarming as it is in its effects, is making such rapid progress among us, that I persuade myself you will candidly accept a plain and faithful address upon the subject. May the divine blessing render what shall now be said effectual, to reclaim those who have departed from this branch of their duty, if any such are now present—confirm the resolution of those by whom it is seriously observed—and put us all upon our guard against the common practice of the multitude around us.

I shall not now attempt to prove the divine appointment, and perpetual obligation of the Sabbath. Whether it is to be considered as of a moral or a positive nature; or, what are the reasons for which it was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week, are questions not now to be discussed. Whoever wishes for information upon these and other subjects, tending to enforce the observance of this sacred day, may obtain it in a

well known publication, entitled *A Treatise on the religious Observation of the Lord's Day*, drawn up by one, who once filled, with distinguished acceptance and usefulness, the place where I now stand. And I wish the book was in the hands of every person that hears me. But the words of our text will lead us to contemplate one particular argument for devoting the seventh part of our time to religious purposes, I mean the distinguished advantage which such a practice is adapted to yield us. The Sabbath, says our Lord, was made for man, *i. e.* for the benefit of man, and not man for the Sabbath; in other words, man was not made for the sake of observing the Sabbath, as a mere test of his obedience, and without any view to his own profit; as might have been supposed from considering the burdensome strictness and useless punctualities with which the superstitious Pharisee enjoined the observation of the day; but the Sabbath was appointed entirely for the sake of Man, and to promote his interest: the day therefore ought to be so observed, as will most effectually answer the end of its institution; not in a total abstinence from the innocent comforts of life, as the hypocritical Pharisees seem to have thought, in the passage from which our text is taken; nor, by a parity of reason, in the immoderate indulgence of them; but in that manner which will best promote our highest interest, for the advancement of which the day was appointed. This, without entering farther into the context, is the sentiment which the words before us are intended to support.

I shall endeavour in the following discourse,

First,

First, To shew how wisely this institution is calculated for the benefit of Man; and point out the distinguished advantages which the serious observance of it, will afford us; and

Secondly, Suggest some remarks for the practical improvement of the subject.

First, I am to represent the distinguished advantages which the observance of one day in seven, for the purposes of religion, will afford us.

If this institution had not been the subject of a divine command, and we had been left entirely at our own option whether to regard it or not, yet still, a due regard for our own best interest, and the interests of other men, would most certainly have recommended it to our veneration. This truth is so generally acknowledged, that there is hardly any civilized nation upon the face of the earth, which has not its stated and weekly seasons for religious worship.

Nor did the practice take its rise from the publication of the Christian doctrine; it was in use long before, not only among the Jews, upon whom it was expressly enjoined by a divine Revelation, but among Heathens and Idolaters, to whom the light of Revelation did not extend. And to what can this general consent of so many different and distant nations be ascribed, but to the reasonableness of the practice itself, and an experience of its tendency to promote the happiness of mankind? If we appeal to the testimony of those who have most conscientiously observed the day, and who must be the best judges of its use and importance, the high terms in which

they speak concerning it—the solicitude they discover that the institution may not fall into neglect—and the satisfaction which they express in every such returning opportunity for renewing their devout intercourse with God, furnish us with abundant evidence of the benefit we may expect to derive from it. One of the primitive Christians calls the Sabbath, or the Lord's Day, as it was usually stiled among them, “the chief of days, and our rest indeed;” another, “the Queen of days; the day on which Christ arose, and death was conquered by Christ;” a day therefore, says a third, “which we keep with gladness.” And the wisest and best men of every age, have always discovered the highest respect for this sacred institution. “*A day in thy courts, says the Psalmist *, is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*”

1st. And if we consider the reasons for which one day in seven was originally set apart to sacred uses, and the duties and employments which are proper to the day, the institution will appear to be of distinguished use and advantage.

It was designed, we are expressly assured, at its first appointment, to impress the minds of men, with reverential sentiments of the great Creator of the world; particularly their dependance upon and obligations to him; to afford them leisure for contemplating, admiring and adoring his perfections,

* Psalm. lxxxiv. 10.

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and works both of creation and Providence, and hereby to promote their conformity to him, upon which all their happiness depended. The time and manner in which the Sabbath was first instituted, evidently prove that the blessed God intended by it to secure to himself the honour and veneration which it is our duty to pay him, as the Creator and Governor of all things, and to confer upon his creatures the pleasure and advantage of maintaining a friendly intercourse with him, by meditation and worship. For no sooner had he finished the heavens and the earth, than this day was set apart to sacred uses. And to make the design of it apparent, we are told * *“that God blessed the Sabbath-day and sanctified it; because that in it he rested from all his works which he had created.”* The same reason is again assigned (Exodus xx. 11.) *“For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”*

Nor does the additional obligation which the Gospel lays us under to observe the day, supersede the force and influence of this. We are still thankfully to contemplate and admire that Almighty Power, by which we and every thing we behold around us, were created, and are constantly maintained in being; to study and rejoice in the amazing displays of wisdom and goodness, which the works of Nature and Providence present to our view; to celebrate the praises of that Great Being, who is the first cause, and the supreme disposer of

* Gen. ii. 3.

all things; and to cherish in our breasts an ardent love and profound veneration for him. The Psalms of David, which were composed for the assistance of religious assemblies, principally turn upon subjects of this kind, and shew how carefully devout worshippers attended, on the Sabbath, to its original design and intention. Now considering the day as particularly devoted to the contemplation and worship of the Maker, Preserver and Governor of the world; what can be thought more reasonable in itself, or more honourable and advantageous to us, than that we should be thus called upon to pay our humble homage before him? What method so likely to keep up the remembrance of his providential government among men, or, to impress upon our own minds a deep and lasting conviction of our vast and interesting concern with him? The religious observation of this sacred day is a security for God that he will always receive a tribute of praise from his dependent creatures: nor do I see how it is possible to prevent the knowledge and veneration of his great name from being lost among us, if the day itself should sink into general neglect. The argument now suggested, should influence all who believe in the being and perfections of one God; how widely soever they differ in their sentiments upon other subjects.

But we who live under the light of the Gospel, are furnished with a farther reason for sanctifying the day; as it is intended to commemorate not only the **Creation**, but the **Redemption** of the world by **Christ Jesus**; and furnishes us with leisure and opportunity for studying the truths which he taught, exercising,

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exercising and improving the graces which he enjoined, and securing an interest in the blessings which he came to bestow. The Resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week, by which he confirmed the truth of his mission, and completed the important business for which he became incarnate, is the particular reason why this day, rather than any other, should be observed as a weekly Sabbath; accordingly, the prevailing practice of the Church from the time of the Apostles to the present period, has furnished a rule for our conduct. And how desirable is it, that an event upon which such interesting consequences depend, should be thus commemorated, and the remembrance of it, and our obligations to God for it, be preserved in the world?

It is our business indeed, on such days as these, not only to commemorate the Redemption of Christ, of which his Resurrection from the dead is the seal and evidence; we are to engage in such duties also, as have a tendency to prepare us for partaking in its blessings. A diligent application to reading, meditation and prayer, a devout attendance upon the public ordinances of religious worship, self-examination, and acts of goodness and mercy, are implied in keeping the Sabbath holy unto the Lord. And how pleasant and profitable does every pious mind find such kind of exercises! To converse with God and ourselves, and the great realities of the life to come; to bow down and worship before God our Maker, study his will, contemplate the rich displays of his Grace in Christ Jesus,

and aspire after an improving conformity to his image; how much more manly and satisfying an employment is this, how much better suited to our state as reasonable, accountable and immortal creatures, and to how much better purpose will it turn in the issue; than to be engaged in the most prosperous pursuits of the present world?

We are not indeed forbid to employ a reasonable concern about the health and accommodation of the body; nor required to make the duties of religion burdensome, by an incessant application to them. The Pharisees pretended, in the passage before us, that it was unlawful for the disciples of our Lord even to pluck the ears of corn for their refreshment; this they called a profanation of the Sabbath; but instead of commending their pretended zeal for so strict an observation of the day, our Lord condemns it as false and superstitious: He expressly allows an attention to the health and accommodation of the body, as what was necessary to strengthen and invigorate the spirits for religious services; and teaches us to consider the day, as a day of joy and thanksgiving, not of abstinence and mortification. The Sabbath, says he, was made for the benefit of man, and should on no account be considered as a forbidding and disgusting thing, or observed in a manner that has a tendency to render it such. In this light it ought always to be represented. The exercises proper to the day are, it is true, of a spiritual and abstracted nature, and will require no small attention on our part, if we engage in them to any advantage; but they are exercises

exercises of the noblest and most interesting kind. And though the mind cannot, whilst it dwells in a body of sin and death, be engaged in these best employments, long together, without some interruption, yet the more they engage our time and attention without fatiguing our spirits, the greater will be our pleasure and improvement; and with the higher satisfaction shall we review our sacred time when we come to the end of it. Let us then for our own sake, and from a hearty esteem of the business and duties of these sacred days, keep them holy unto the Lord.

2. Consider the salutary influence which this practice will have upon the interest of society in general; and how necessary it is to the good order of families, as well as larger communities of men.

“ I think (says an eminent writer *) that if keeping holy the seventh day, were only a human institution, it would have been the best method that could have been thought on, for the polishing and civilizing of mankind. It is certain, that country people, especially, would soon degenerate into a kind of savages and barbarians, were there not such frequent returns of a stated time, in which the whole neighbourhood meet together, with their best faces, and in their cleanliest habits, to converse with one another, hear their duty explained to them, and join together in adoration of the Supreme Being,

* ADDISON.

“ Sunday, says he, clears away the rust of the
 “ whole week ; not only as it refreshes in their
 “ minds the notion of religion, but as it puts them
 “ upon appearing in their most agreeable forms,
 “ and exerting all such qualities, as are apt to give
 “ them a figure in the eyes of one another.”

We may farther add, that by assembling together, for the purposes of religious worship, and uniting in the same devout supplications and praises to the God and Father of mercies, personal animosities are checked and suppressed ; and men are naturally led to form an esteem for and friendship with one another.

But what is most important, in the present case, by this means the knowledge and fear of God, and a conviction of the duty we owe to him, and to one another, the surest foundation of public as well as private happiness, is enlarged and strengthened. Many persons in the lower classes of life, have scarce any leisure and opportunity for the study of religious truths, but what these sacred days afford them : and it is much to be apprehended, that some others, whose station and circumstances enable them to command what time they please, would seldom turn their thoughts to such subjects if they were not brought to their remembrance by returning seasons of public worship. And I tremble to think of the ruinous consequences that would unavoidably follow, if religious principles, the grand bonds of human society, should come to be generally lost.

It is but little indeed, compared with our wishes, that the ministration of religious ordinances does to
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stem the torrent of vice and infidelity which prevail around us; but something it certainly does to check their progress, and preserve the appearance and profession of religion in the world. Were all days laid open alike, to secular business and sensual pleasures, it cannot be doubted but the same ignorance and irregularity, which are to be found among the habitual profaners of the Sabbath, would become universal; the fear and worship of God would be soon banished from the world; mutual confidence among men dissolved, and society turned into a scene of contest and confusion.

In order to prevent such dreadful calamities, all well-regulated States have enforced the observance of these sacred days under the severest penalties. Many excellent laws, the wisdom of government hath enacted in our own land; to deter those from the profanation of the Lord's day, who cannot be restrained by superior obligations. Among the Jews, this crime was, by a divine order, punished with death; and public judgments were denounced against, and always inflicted upon them, whenever it became their national iniquity. There is indeed no one crime that has a more fatal influence upon the happiness of any people, that has a greater tendency to promote a general dissoluteness of manners; or that may more justly be expected to incur the displeasure of the Almighty. If we would not then, by our influence and example, encourage that spirit of licentiousness and impiety which has so dangerous an aspect upon the welfare of our country, and hereby add to the national guilt, already too great

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and alarming; if we would not contribute our part to introduce disorder and distress among all ranks of people, and expose ourselves and our land to the divine indignation; let us discover and labour to promote a veneration for these sacred days, on the religious observance of which, our national safety and prosperity so evidently depend. Men may talk of the love they bear to their country; but they are its worst and most dangerous enemies, (let them make what profession they will of zeal for its interest) who by putting contempt upon the public ordinances of religion, do what they can to introduce a licentiousness of principle and practice among us, and break down the most powerful restraints under which mankind can be laid to behave well towards one another. “Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.*” The one will secure the protection of the Almighty; the other will certainly incur his displeasure; the former promotes peace and good order among the different members of which society consists; will teach magistrates to rule with wisdom and faithfulness; and dispose subjects to pay their superiors a cheerful obedience; whereas the latter introduces confusion and disorder among all. But how is it possible that virtue and religion should diffuse their salutary influence through a nation, or a stop be put to the prevalence of great and daring impieties; when the very means of religion, in the faithful use of which alone, a reformation can be effected, come to be treated with general neglect?

* Prov. xiv. 34.

3. A serious observation of the Lord's day, will do much to advance the credit and interest of religion in the world.

The return of such days, if they are devoted to the purposes for which they were instituted, affords the professors of religion an opportunity of publicly declaring themselves its friends and advocates. We should see but little appearance of religion among men, if the solemn assemblies of the sabbath were broken up. But when a number of devout worshippers, meet together in the presence of Almighty God, professedly to adore his infinite Majesty, and to avow themselves his devoted servants; this keeps up the face of religion in the world, and gives countenance and courage to those who would otherwise, perhaps, be ashamed to appear on its side. Men are not now afraid to stand forth as advocates in support of a cause, in which they see so many others ready to join them. The public worship of God, regularly maintained and attended, contains a solemn attestation from the general consent of mankind, to the reality and importance of religious principles; and plainly shews, that much as infidels and wicked men have endeavoured to ridicule and suppress them, they do still preserve some considerable respect in the world.

It is besides a likely mean of promoting the knowledge of such principles among persons, who are at present strangers to them; as well as of increasing their influence, where they are already believed. The service of the Sabbath, by calling,

calling off our attention from present and temporal things, to things future and eternal, tends to check our too eager pursuit of the world and vanity; to refine and elevate our views, spiritualize our affections, and implant and improve in our breasts those graces of the Spirit, in the exercise of which all true religion consists. Nor do I see how it is possible that religion should ever revive and flourish among any people, where the ordinances of public worship, the appointed means for begetting and promoting it, are treated with habitual neglect; or, how it should lose its power, where they are seriously observed.

The Nonconformists of the last age, in whose lives and characters, amidst all the imperfections with which they have been charged, the graces and virtues of the Christian temper were certainly carried to distinguished eminence, discovered an unusual zeal for the observation of the Sabbath: and I doubt not, that under God, the uncommon attainments which they made in piety and devotion, are chiefly to be ascribed to their conscientious improvement of the sacred day. Their strictness in this particular, has indeed been sometimes mentioned to their reproach; and might perhaps in some instances be carried too far: happy however had it been for us, their descendants, if we had copied their example, rather than run, as is too much the case, into the quite opposite extreme. Would we see religion revive and flourish in our churches again, as it did in their day, the Sabbath of the Lord must be esteemed honourable and holy, and his or-

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dinances and institutions carefully attended: these are the means which he has appointed for that purpose, and in the diligent improvement of which, he has promised, and always bestowed his blessing. Then may we, with good reason, hope to see his glory, as it has been seen in his sanctuary, when we thus faithfully and devoutly seek him.

4. The pleasure and profit which a religious observance of the day will certainly yield to our own souls, furnishes another argument to enforce the duty.

That it has an immediate tendency to promote our knowledge, faith, holiness, and joy, might easily be proved, if time would permit me to enter particularly into the subject. Indeed the question hardly admits a doubt; and the experience of good men in all ages of the church abundantly determines it. Nothing can be conceived more proper to excite good affections, improve our acquaintance with divine truths, and administer to our consolation, than a careful attention to the different services for which the day itself was instituted.

The right improvement of the Sabbath will have a happy tendency to prepare us for the duties and trials of the following week; secure the blessing of God upon all our secular concerns; and fit us for conflicting with the temptations and preserve us from being ensnared by the pleasures of the world. If it was not for the return of these sacred days, on which we are called aside from the pursuit of temporal objects, we should be in imminent danger of being wholly engrossed by them. It is difficult,
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with all the care we can employ, to guard against their ensnaring influence; still they are apt to usurp an undue place in our thoughts and affections, to damp our religious zeal, and lessen our esteem for things future and eternal. But what a fatal influence would they have upon our tempers, if no seasons of sober thought and recollection were appointed to assist us in suppressing our too anxious concern about them? Soon alas! would the immortal part of our nature be quite immersed in the cares and pursuits of the body; and forgetting our heavenly birth and destination, we should be wholly employed in providing for the accommodation of this life. Having so much to do with objects which are apt by insensible degrees to entangle and sensualize our hearts, we greatly need the assistance which these sacred days afford us, to recollect ourselves, and direct our affections and pursuits to nobler concerns. In this respect it is undoubtedly a most friendly and merciful institution, that one day in seven is set apart for religious purposes. And if we feel any just regard for our true interest, instead of saying of the Sabbath, as the degenerate Jews did, * "What a weariness is it?" we shall rejoice in the opportunities which it affords us for attending to what is infinitely greater moment than any temporal affairs, our future and eternal welfare.

Nor is a serious attention to the duties of the day, less pleasant to a thoughtful and devout mind, than it is profitable. By a person of a sensual taste, nothing indeed will be thought pleasant

* Malachi i. 13,

cept what tends to gratify the senses and appetites of the body. But a soul that is born from above, and who, by the power of divine grace forming him to a divine and heavenly temper, knows how to distinguish the things that differ, and to prefer those which are most excellent, to such a soul, the return of these sacred seasons brings a welcome release from the cares and labours of this vain world; calls him to engage in services from which he derives the most rational and satisfying enjoyment, and which, in some happy moments, he would be glad to continue without interruption, if his duty would permit it, till he enters upon that rest which remains for the people of God; for which his earthly Sabbaths are designed to prepare him, and of which they often yield him a delightful foretaste and earnest. Now taking all these things into consideration, the nature and importance of the business to which the Sabbath is consecrated—The beneficial influence which a serious observance of the day will have upon the interest of society—The credit which it will do to religion in the world—And the profit and pleasure which it is fitted to yield to our own souls; how wise and good an institution should we esteem it, and with what care and seriousness, ought it to be observed by us?

IMPROVEMENT.

1st. We may learn, from what has been said, the great goodness of God in making that the subject of an express command, which our own interest so strongly enforces.

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I have hitherto considered the advantage of the institution, as a reason for our complying with it, rather than the *authority* by which it is enjoined. But we are to remember, that with respect to the duty before us, we are not left to our own option, whether to regard it or not. The same authority that says "do not kill"—"do not bear false witness"—"do not covet," says also "remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy. And it is at our peril, if we venture to disobey the righteous order. We certainly ought not, and if we entertain any real regard for our own happiness, we shall not dare to wish for an exemption from this latter command any more than from the former. They are all holy, and just, and good. In the instance before us, our merciful Creator has most evidently connected our duty and interest together, so that he who sinneth against him, injureth his own soul. This consideration affords a striking evidence of the great goodness of God; and should render our obedience chearful and active, constant and persevering.

2d. If the Sabbath is purposely ordained for the benefit of man, then that is the best manner of spending it, and most agreeable to the design of its institution, which will be productive of the greatest advantage to us.

And what that manner is, no one can doubt, who thinks seriously upon the subject. To employ the day in scenes of pleasure and dissipation, as many do, at an expence which they can but ill afford, is certainly,

tainly, by this rule of judging, a vile profanation of the day; for it is a way of spending it, which, instead of yielding any real profit, proves very injurious both to the bodies and souls of men.

To fill up the day, or at least a large proportion of it, in adjusting secular affairs, which might as well, perhaps much better, be dispatched at another time, if a proper degree of prudence and application was employed for that purpose, is a shameful perversion of sacred time; for it may be turned to much better account, in adjusting the more important concerns which depend between God and every man's own soul; and in cultivating and improving those graces of the Spirit, which are necessary to our future and eternal welfare.

Again, for men under pretence of consulting the health of the body, to neglect the means appointed for promoting the health and happiness of the soul; under this pretence, I say, to desert their places in the house of God, when they are well enough to attend all other places, where business and inclination invite them; to spend those hours in travelling, visiting and diversion, which ought to be employed in the public and private worship of their Maker, in the study of his will, and in forming their minds to a meetness for the heavenly world; this is not improving sacred time, but abusing it, and instead of turning to their advantage, will prove highly injurious to them; by encouraging that indifference about their religious interest, which is, after all, the grand source of these criminal irregularities.

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Finally, To act as if the business and duties of the day were finished, when the hours of public worship are over; immediately to engage in parties of amusement and dissipation, which have a direct tendency to suppress every good thought and serious impression, is certainly to lose the salutary effect of religious ordinances, and will, in the end, amount to much the same as not attending upon them at all. As the day is purposely set apart and affords us the best opportunity for improving our minds in the knowledge, love and image of God, regulating our tempers, and acquiring meetness for the employments and happiness of the heavenly state; we ought to spend all the time we can, without breaking in upon the necessary concerns of this life, and exhausting our spirits, in those exercises public and private, which will have a happy tendency to promote these desirable purposes. And this manner of spending the day, I am sure, will yield us the greatest profit, and be followed with the most comfortable review living and dying: whilst those who make no conscience in what manner the day is employed, and are at leisure for every trifle and impertinency that offers, are laying up in store for themselves a fund of bitter reflection, against that day, when their mispent time, and neglected privileges, shall rise up in judgment against them, as witnesses of their guilt, to justify and aggravate their condemnation.

3. If the Sabbath is intended for the benefit of man, certainly parents and masters, in kindness to those who are placed under their influence, should teach and

and encourage them religiously to observe the day; at least should restrain them, by that authority which God and nature have put into their hands, from every profanation of it.

The latter, they certainly may do, and the former they will, to the utmost of their power, if they feel any just regard for the present and eternal interest of those with whom they are so nearly connected. And sure I am those heads of families have much to answer for to God, to their families, and to their own consciences, who neglect this necessary branch of their duty. How can parents reasonably expect that their children will prove blessings to them, if they are suffered to grow up into life without being taught to reverence the institutions of their heavenly Friend and Father? or, what wonder is it, that masters should find room to complain their servants are disobedient to their orders, when no pains are taken to impress upon their minds a proper sense of the duty they owe to their supreme Sovereign and Lord?

The profanation of the sacred day, which I am sorry to say many heads of families, and persons in superior stations of life, instead of checking have encouraged by their examples, is, no doubt, one principal source of that general dissoluteness of manners and contempt of religion, particularly among young persons, and in the lower ranks of people, which have of late made so rapid a progress, and are so justly to be lamented in our land: nor can we with any reason hope to see a better state of morals prevail, until a more careful attention is

paid to the public ordinances of religious worship. Let us then all unite in our several stations, and exert every power we possess, to revive their credit, and awaken in the breasts of men in general, particularly those who are placed under our influence, a higher esteem and veneration for them. And may the blessing of God crown with success every attempt to answer this desirable purpose: *Amen.*

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